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ROUBADOOR

Alternative country, Americana, roots, folk,
blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news



February 2007

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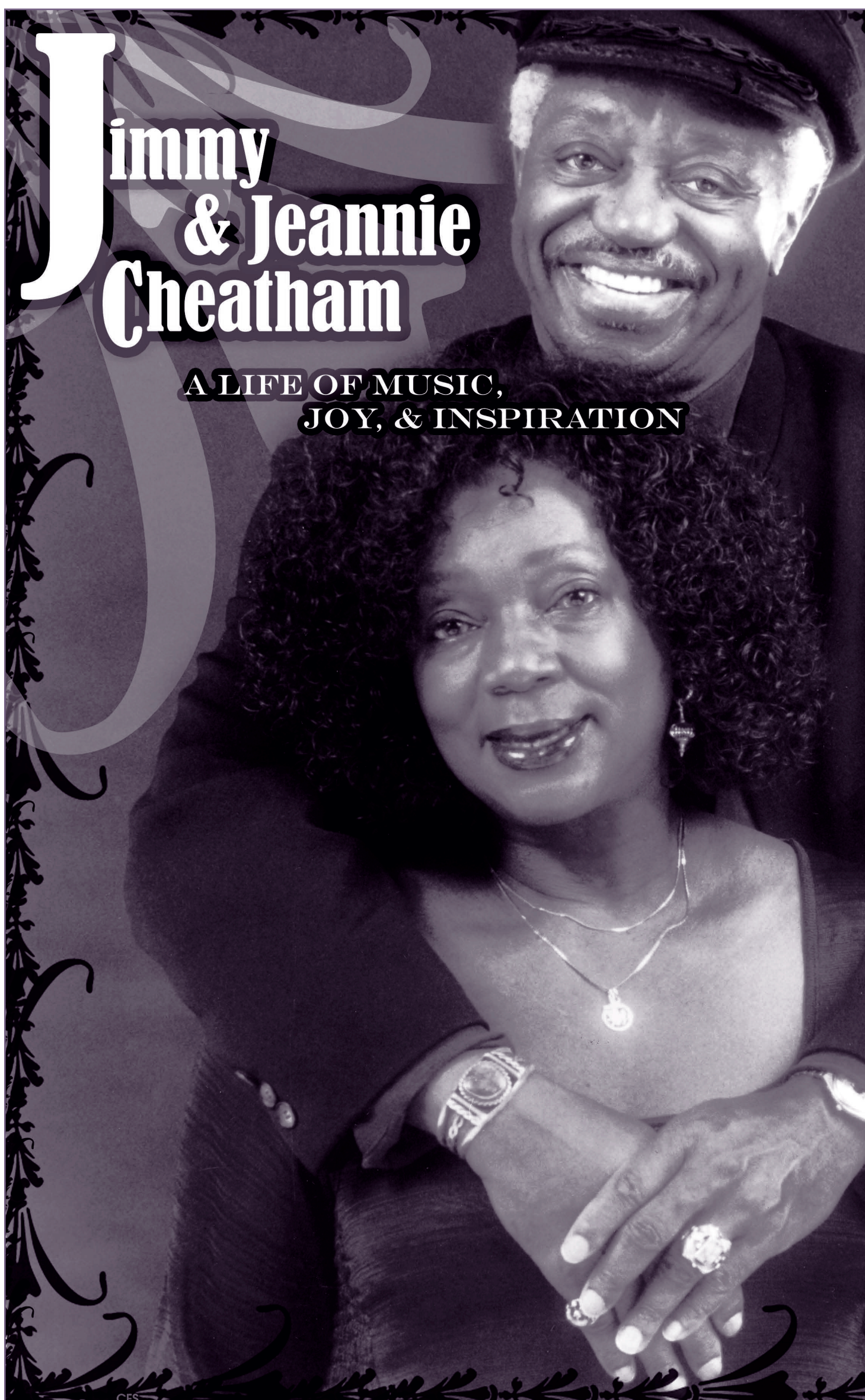
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To promote, encourage, and provide an alternative voice for the great local music that is generally overlooked by the mass media; namely the genres of alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass. To entertain, educate, and bring together players, writers, and lovers of these forms; to explore their foundations; and to expand the audience for these types of music.

SAN DIEGO TROUBADOUR, the local source for alternative country, Americana, roots, folk, blues, gospel, jazz, and bluegrass music news, is published monthly and is free of charge. Letters to the editor must be signed and may be edited for content. It is not, however, guaranteed that they will appear.

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The San Diego Troubadour is dedicated to the memory of Ellen and Lyle Duplessie, whose vision inspired the creation of this newspaper.

Remembering Sneaky Pete

by Liz Abbott

Sneaky Pete Kleinow (1934-2007), ground-breaking steel guitar prodigy, whose unique stylings influenced a generation of young musicians, died last month in northern California from complications of Alzheimer's Disease. During a music career that spanned 60 years, Kleinow helped shape the California country-rock genre during the late 1960s and 1970s. Spotted in 1968 by Gram Parsons playing with a country band at a small club in North Hollywood, the two, along with Chris Hillman, would soon form the Flying Burrito Brothers, which blended country music and rock and roll together to create a radical new sound. Over the next 30 years Kleinow would earn recognition as one of the most sought-after and respected steel guitarists in the business, playing in hundreds of sessions with a long list of top artists.

In addition to his music, Kleinow concurrently enjoyed a successful career as a film animator and special effects artist, which began in 1963 when he moved to California and was hired by *Gumby* creator Art Clokey. His work for film and television lasted into the 1990s.

Bill Herzog, friend of the *San Diego Troubadour* remembers, "... I was a huge fan of Sneaky myself. I really got hooked on his unique style after buying the third Flying Burrito Brothers LP. I think that album is the best sampler of Sneaky's diverse stylings to this day. Actually, all through the '70s and '80s if I saw Sneaky listed on an album's credits, I would buy the album whether I knew the artist or not. If Sneaky Pete played on it, it had to be cool.

"As a matter of fact, when I had my country rock band back in the O.C. country craze of the mid '70s, my steel player and I decided that we were going to do every song off the ground-breaking *Gilded Palace of Sin* album (complete with pedal steel distortion and phase shifting). That didn't always go over so well with the dance floor masses who

wanted only to hear songs from the *Urban Cowboy* soundtrack and do their stupid line dances. No one told us you couldn't do the cotton-eyed joe to "Dark End of the Street."

John Jorgenson, who also played with Kleinow, shares the following memories. (Jorgenson comes to *Dizzy's* on March 1. See page 12 for details.)

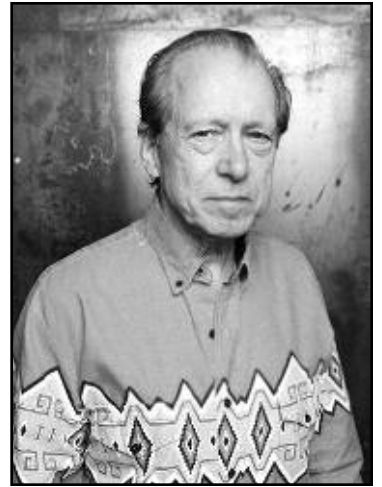


The Cheatin' Hearts, circa 1983 — Bill Bryson, Kleinow, Jorgenson, Kittra Moore, Bob Knight, Steve Duncan

"In 1983 I put together a country band in L.A. called the Cheatin' Hearts with a couple friends — Kittra Strejan (now Moore) and Bob Knight. We all three sang and Bob and I played guitar, but we needed a rhythm section and steel player to fill out the band. I brought in my friend Bill Bryson on bass and Steve Duncan on drums. I couldn't believe my ears when Kittra said she could get Sneaky Pete to come play with us. I had seen him with the Flying Burrito Brothers at the Palomino in the '70s and loved his playing on so many records, he had already been legendary for a couple decades by then. I can't remember if we even rehearsed with him before our first gig, but I remember the gig well. It was at the Club Lingerie, and there were heavenly sounds coming from his amp that night! I was really thrilled to be on stage with one of my heroes, but the fact that he really liked our band and wanted to become a member was just amazing.

"He was with us the first time we went into a studio to do some demos, and I remember him not being able to get any sound out of his steel guitar until he unscrewed a control plate from the top of the guitar and dangled it outside by its wires! No matter, the sounds that came out were unique and we all felt honored to have his creative tones and playing on our songs.

"Sneaky graciously arranged for us to be able to rehearse in the warehouse where he made the miniature cityscapes for film effects, and it seemed so surreal to be playing country rock surrounded



Sneaky Pete Kleinow

by tiny versions of Los Angeles and New York City! His eccentric and creative abilities obviously extended beyond music, as he would explain to us how he would set up mini explosions in the models to blow up the trucks and buildings!

"We ended up playing together for a couple years around the L.A. scene before he got too busy with the special effects. I met his old bandmate Chris Hillman with whom I formed the Desert Rose Band. I really cherish that time and am still pretty amazed that the first steel player that I was ever in a band with was the incredible Sneaky Pete Kleinow!"

A note from Gene Parsons, member of the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers:

"Pete was a one of a kind genius and a dear friend. Aside from his pioneering animation works he was a unique and innovative steel guitarist with a sound like no other. Odd tuning on an antique eight-string Fender. Wonderful! You always knew it was Sneaky Pete playing! I am so glad to have known Peter Kleinow and I will miss him."



Flying Burrito Brothers' album cover showing Kleinow on lower left, along with (clockwise from top left) Gram Parsons, Chris Etheridge, and Chris Hillman

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Texas Songwriter Showcase Musical Campfire at Alpine

by Steve Thorn

On February 28, fans of the Texas songwriting tradition will have a rare opportunity to see and hear four living legends together on stage at a special songwriters' showcase. The four troubadours, who are also old friends, have long been recognized as exceptional storytellers in their own right through the poignancy of their songs that have touched and inspired countless fans. A once-in-a-lifetime concert experience!

The first songwriter has provided the stamp of authentication on his songs of the working man.

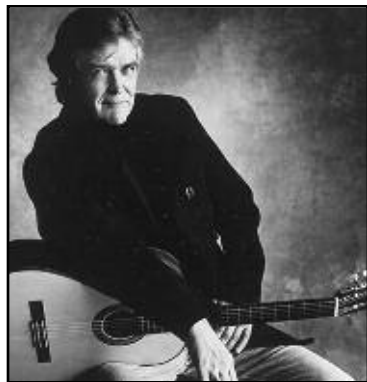
After several decades compiling an impressive discography, the second songwriter's music is currently the focus of attention — no longer is it about his famous hair or his prior marriage to an actress.

The third songwriter waded in different musical categories before becoming a major voice in Americana.

And the fourth songwriter has become a West Texas music legend, continuing the legacy of recording artists Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and Waylon Jennings.

The songwriters — Guy Clark, Lyle Lovett, John Hiatt, and Joe Ely — will be bringing over a century of combined musical talent to the Viejas Casino's concert series this month with the Texas Songwriter Show, a summit for the uniquely individual talents of these four participants.

guy clark



Although he is the elder statesman of the four, Guy Clark's repertoire is revered by both veteran performers and musical neophytes. Clark was born in a rural America where family conversation and interaction were essential. In small West Texas towns like Monahans (Clark's birthplace), relationships were golden.

"It's [Monahans] just a little piece of desert," said Clark during an interview with Rusty Miller, host of the *This Is Americana* radio show. "I was out there not long ago, and it reminded me how bleak it is . . . but there's something about the desert that I've always loved, being born there. It's flat, so flat that you can see the curvature of the earth."

Clark said that both of his parents "were fairly well-read. We were always encouraged in any sort of artistic endeavor. I grew up in kind of a pre-TV era. We didn't have a television set until my senior year in high school. After dinner, we would sit around and read aloud poetry and books. We'd sometimes played games like Scrabble. Any sort of intellectual endeavor was encouraged."

After spending the late '60s in California, pitching songs and performing, Clark and his wife, Susanna (a fine songwriter as well, whose composition "A Quarter Moon in a Ten Cent Town" was recorded by Emmylou Harris) moved in 1971 to a Nashville that was undergoing a musical renaissance. While Clark felt at

home with the Music City's movers and shakers of the day (Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, etc.), his closest relationship was with a fellow Texan singer-songwriter: the late Townes Van Zandt.

Following the 2004 release of the documentary *Be Here to Love Me: A Film About Townes Van Zandt*, much was written about Van Zandt's bout with manic depression, the ensuing insulin shock therapy, and the long-term memory loss, which came as a result of the radical medical treatment. Clark preferred to remember Van Zandt as more than another tormented artist wrestling with demons.

"Townes and I were best friends for 35 years," said Clark. "We never tried to write together, and we never played gigs together for that whole time. He was just the smartest, brightest, funniest guy I ever met in my life. For all his 'dark' reputation, I don't think I've ever met anyone smarter — or funnier."

This year the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences has honored Clark by nominating his latest album, *Workbench Songs*, in the best contemporary folk/Americana category. The album's title refers to Clark's talents as a major artisan. During the time he spent in California, Clark made dobros for the Dopyera brothers' National Dobro Company. He now makes Flamenco guitars in his own workshop. *Workbench Songs* includes many tracks worthy of its Grammy nomination, including "Tornado Time in Texas," "Cinco de Mayo in Memphis," and "Magdalene."

lyle lovett



After several successful forays into big band swing (*Lyle Lovett and his Large Band*, 1987), gospel (*Joshua Judges Ruth*, 1989), or Baja California day tripping (*Road to Ensenada*, 1996), it will be interesting to see what Lovett brings to the musical campfire and storytelling imagery of the Alpine concert. A graduate of Texas A&M University with degrees in German and journalism, Lovett has taken an academic approach to his songwriting craft through astute observations on the human condition. The Klein, Texas, native has also been influenced by Van Zandt's body of work.

"Townes Van Zandt, I think, is regarded by any singer-songwriter from Texas in the highest way," said Lovett during a 1998 interview with Jody Denburg of the *Austin Chronicle*. "It's hard to think of Townes Van Zandt and not mention Guy Clark as well. Guy and Townes were long-time friends and, I think, influences on one another. So I always think of Guy and Townes together, really. But as you know, we lost Townes [in 1997]. And gosh, the first album of Townes I ever bought was *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt*. I heard Don Sanders in Houston play "Pancho and Lefty." That was the first I ever heard of Townes. He introduced the song and said who had written it, and I went out and found *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt*. It was one of those albums I tried to learn every song on."

If the relationship between Clark and

Van Zandt was special, so was Lovett's collaboration with film director Robert Altman, who passed away last November. Not every singer's transition into acting has been smooth (just ask Tony Bennett or Mariah Carey) but in Altman Lovett found a perfect mentor for his offbeat comical delivery. The Altman films (*The Player*, 1992; *Short Cuts*, 1993; *Ready to Wear*, 1995; and *Cookie's Fortune*, 1999) established Lovett as a sought-after character actor.

Lovett's most recent album of new material was *My Baby Don't Tolerate* in 2003. In the same year he also recorded *Smile*, an album celebrating popular songs in contemporary cinema.

john hiatt



There are three phases in Hiatt's lengthy recording career. After arriving in Nashville in the early '70s, Hiatt was firmly entrenched in the singer-songwriter regiment, which became synonymous with the decade. For every James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Jim Croce, and Cat Stevens that received plaudits, there were dozens more aspiring singer-songwriters waiting for their curtain calls. Hiatt was one of them.

Hiatt's first two albums were released on Epic Records. *Hangin' Around the Observatory* (1974) and *Overcoats* (1975) failed to connect with the public or the influential music critics of the time. By the end of the '70s, Hiatt had moved to a different town (Los Angeles) and another record label (MCA). He was no longer wearing the singer-songwriter ID but was aggressively being promoted as an American counterpart to the British New Wave's angry young men, Elvis Costello and Graham Parker. The scowling photographs of Hiatt on the album covers of *Slug Line* (1979) and *Two Bit Monsters* (1980) seemed contrary to the ebullient life-of-the-party persona he demonstrated in his live shows.

By the time *All of a Sudden* (1982) was released, Hiatt had moved on to another record label (Geffen), but he was still perceived as a "modern world" artist. *All of a Sudden* was memorable for producer Tony Visconti's (T-Rex, David Bowie) involvement and great Hiatt tracks, including "Walking Dead" and "I Look for Love." *Riding with the King* (1983) included production by Nick Lowe, with a scorching title track that later became part of a collaborative recording project for Eric Clapton and B.B. King.

After the disappointing *Warming Up to the Ice Age* (1985), Hiatt astonished the industry and the general public with *Bring the Family* (1987), his first album for A&M Records and one of the great American albums of the '80s. Assisted by Lowe, session guitarist Ry Cooder, and drummer Jim Keltner, Hiatt organized the sessions in a manner similar to Frank Sinatra's recording philosophy: record "live" in the studio and knock the album out in a couple of days.

The third phase of Hiatt's recording career — roots Americana — began with *Bring the Family*. "Memphis in the Meantime," "Have a Little Faith in Me,"

and "Thing Called Love" (a big cover hit for Bonnie Raitt) continue to be concert favorites to this day. With *Bring the Family*, Hiatt finally found his musical niche. Twenty years and several albums later, he remains a vital songwriting force.

joe ely



Of the four songwriters, it is Joe Ely who probably possesses the most eclectic musical background. From opening for the Clash to jamming with saxophonist Bobby Keys and singing duets with former San Diegan Rosie Flores, Ely doesn't believe in musical barriers, he simply plows through them.

The Amarillo, Texas, native first recorded tapes as part of the Flatlanders, an adventurous band that featured Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. The 1972 recordings initially didn't register much of a buzz, but Ely, Hancock, and Gilmore went on to develop individual cult followings in the alternative country scene.

It's been a roller coaster career for Ely, bouncing between the major labels and smaller independents, such as Hightone Records. The concert circuit has remained his bread and butter, and riveting live performances captured in *Live Shots* (1980), *Live at Liberty Lunch* (1990), and

TEXAS SONGWRITER TRIVIA

Guy Clark's "LA Freeway" was a sizeable hit for Jerry Jeff Walker, best known as the composer of "Mr. Bojangles." Clark began writing the song after a late night trip back to L.A. following a gig in San Diego.

Source: Rusty Miller interview with Guy Clark on the radio show *This Is Americana*. www.guyclark.com

Lyle Lovett's ancestors originally founded the town of Klein. Today, it's a suburb of Houston.

Source: www.lylelovett.com

John Hiatt is an honorary Texas songwriter. While Clark, Lovett, and Ely are native sons of the Lone Star State, Hiatt is a Hoosier. Maybe that explains why the welcome carpet is always rolled out for Hiatt on *Late Night with David Letterman*. Both Hiatt and the show's host hail from Indianapolis.

Ely archivist Jason Demiola wrote that Joe "saw Jerry Lee Lewis playing on a flatbed trailer in an Amarillo dust storm when he was six years old. Attracted by free hot dogs and cokes, his parents nudge up to the front of the stage. A Pontiac dealer is selling cars. He announces a "piano playin' fool from Ferriday." He remembers the microphone blowing over from the strength of the wind and everyone wearing bandanas over their noses."

Source: www.joeely.com

Live at Antone's (2000) probably serve as a better introduction to Ely than his studio releases.

This year looks like a productive one for the indefatigable Ely. This month sees the release of a new CD, *Happy Songs from Rattlesnake Gulch*. Also this year, the University of Texas will publish a collection of Ely's writings.

The Texas Songwriter Show with Guy Clark, Lyle Lovett, John Hiatt, and Joe Ely takes place on Wednesday, February 28, 8 p.m., at Viejas Casino, Alpine. For details, go to www.viejascasino.com

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Play Guitar Naked



Recordially, Lou Curtiss



Photo: Bill Richardson

Lou Curtiss

A YEAR OF ANNIVERSARIES

This year I'll be celebrating two very special anniversaries. Number one, which is coming up in May, will be the 40th anniversary of the first San Diego Folk Festival at San Diego State University, which became the Adams Avenue Roots Festival in the early 1990s and continues today as the Adams Avenue Roots and Folk Festival. This year's festival will take place on Saturday and Sunday, April 21-22. The second anniversary is that of Folk Arts Rare Records, which opened its doors for the first time on July 31, 1967. When we opened, there were no CDs, no DVDs, not even videotape. We carried new and used LPs and have always relied on our musical knowledge to keep up with the big boys. Putting people together with their roots and getting people interested in other peoples' roots (both live and recorded) have always been what I care about. I wouldn't trade those 40 years doing what I've done with anyone. I guess we'll figure out a way to celebrate. Watch here for how and when.

COLLECTING VINTAGE RECORDINGS

For many years I've been involved in contributing to and finding additions to most of the major discographies. If you are a collector of any kind of vintage records, discographies and, to a lesser extent, price guides are valuable tools. For a collector of 78s, they are both necessities. One of the most important ones is Brian Rust's *Jazz Records, 1897-1942*. You can get the most updated version from Storyville Press. Rust also put together *The American Dance Band Discography* (which is out of print but you might find a copy from Arlington House in New Rochelle, New York) and *The Complete Entertainment Discography, 1897-1942*, available from Da Capo Press, which lists all the great vaudeville, movie, and show people who made records. Rust also did a *Victor Master Book*, which contains a complete Victor label listing in chronological order.

For those of you into blues and gospel, it's *Blues and Gospel Records, 1902-1943* by R.M.W. Dixon and J. Godrich, also available from

Storyville. For people into old time country music, it's *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* by Tony Russell, available from Oxford University Press.

Other discographies are more specialized, but the ones I use a lot are *Country Music Sources: A Biblio-Discography of Commercially Recorded Traditional Music* by Guthrie Meade and Dick Spottswood from the University of North Carolina; the Southern Folklife Collection's *Virginia Blues Country and Gospel Records, 1902-1943* by Kip Lornell, University of Kentucky Press; *Discography of Western Swing and Hot String Bands, 1928-1942* by Cary Ginell and Kevin Coffey; and the *Decca Hillbilly Discography, 1927-1945*, also by Cary Ginell. Joel Whitburn has compiled a number of books published by Record Research Press, most of which are taken from *Billboard* magazine polls of top-selling records. I use his *Pop Memories*, which includes best-selling songs from 1890-1954 and the artists who recorded them. For those who like blues should consult the most recent edition of *The Blues Discography, 1943-1970* by Les Fancourt and Bob McGrath. The book is published in Canada by Bob McGrath and is a much updated and revised version of the long out-of-print Neil Slaven-Mike Leadbitter volume.

For the person who collects ethnic music from other countries issued in the U.S., there's Dick Spottswood's *Ethnic Music on Records* (nine volumes) from University of Illinois Press. This

one is expensive but it's a must have if these kinds of music are your thing.

As far as the price guides go, I use them as guides only, not Bibles. For the 78 era I refer to L.R. Dock's *American Premium Record Guide*, published by Books Americana, to give me an idea of a 78's worth. I use most of the other guides issued by a variety of publishers as a listing of what's what, not what's worth what. Record values are constantly changing and what a record might be worth to someone today may not be the same next week. Like all hobbies or pastimes, record collecting is a whole lot more pleasurable with the right tools. People who put together discographies and price guides are the unsung heroes of record collectors everywhere.

A lot of discographical information is available on line and that includes recorded samples. I've covered some of that in past columns and will do so again in the future. For you rockabilly and country boogie-woogie fans, check out rockincountrystyle.com and, of course, visit folkart-rarerecords.com where you'll find links to all kinds of cool stuff.

Recordially,

Lou Curtiss

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Yafe Strom

by Paul Hormick

Yafe Strom is a rare mix. He is both a talented performer who leads his band, Hot Pstromi, and an academic, who has taught at New York University. He is a world-renowned ethnographer, chronicling and capturing the lives of Eastern European Jews, and he has even written a symphony. All of this is bound up, tied together, inspired, and enlightened by Strom's passion for klezmer.

He has recently returned to San Diego to take the position of artist in residence at his alma mater, San Diego State University. As an artist in residence he pretty much creates, as most artists do, but he also teaches at least one class each semester. Last semester he taught a history of klezmer music, and this semester he is teaching a class called "Was Columbus a Jew? Sephardic History from Seville to San Diego."

Hot Pstromi performs just about anywhere you can find a yarmulke and features Strom's wife, Elizabeth Schwartz on vocals. Schwartz has

a beautiful voice that's at once full and zesty, then light and lilting. If she sang the national anthem before the ballgame, you'd feel great even if your team lost. Jeff Pekarec, whom Strom befriended when both were teenagers, is the backbone of the band, serving as the bassist and arranger. Pekarec has also worked with Strom on several other musical projects. Names of other well-known San Diego musicians — Fred Benedetti, Mark Dresser, and Tripp Sprague among others — get mentioned when Strom talks about Hot Pstromi and his other musical work.

Many things have led to the role Strom has assumed as grand marshal of all things Jewish, but one day stands out among the others: March 1, 1981.

On that day the headlines were practically screaming about the threat that the Salvadoran Marxist posed to our way of life. And there was an anti-nuclear rally in what was then known as West Germany. Other headlines may point up

Yafe Strom: A Passion for Old Musical Traditions

how much things haven't changed. The *San Diego Union* featured a full spread on the "debate" over evolution and creationism, while another headline read "Democrats Ponder How to Revitalize Party."

Strom had recently finished his undergraduate work at San Diego State, earning degrees in American studies and furniture design, but it looked like his future would be in law. He had just completed the LSAT. That night, however, Strom went with a friend to Sushi Gallery to hear the Big Jewish Band play a night of klezmer music.

Strom enjoyed the band and, being a pretty good fiddler, approached them and asked if he could join. They gave him the brush-off, the old "don't call us we'll call you." By the end of the night Strom determined that if he was unable to join the band, he'd start his own. "You know the old saying, If you can't join 'em, beat 'em," he says. "I thought San Diego is big enough for two klezmer bands. I thought also that I would try to play the tunes and songs that nobody else was doing, the klezmer compositions that were possibly about to be forgotten."

So he decided to embark on a search for these soon-to-be-forgotten songs. Leaving the LSAT and the possibility of law school behind, Strom bought a one-way ticket that June to Vienna, gateway to the then Soviet block countries. With about \$500 in hand, a bit of knowledge of Yiddish, a camera, and some recording equipment, Strom set out to find and transcribe or record the songs and melodies of Eastern European Jews first-hand.

Strom quickly learned the ins and outs of working the streets and about the bureaucratic shenanigans of Stalinist government officials, where a bribe of a few Marlboro cigarettes could get him across a border. He ended up spending a year behind what was referred to at the time as the Iron Curtain, digging where he could to find klezmer nuggets, recording when he could, and copying when he had to. In one case, being without a recorder, he asked a klezmer musician to play a tune over and over so he could play along and learn the tune to transcribe later. "In Bucharest I was at a library and asked to Xerox a

Photo: Liz Abbott



Strom tells stories and plays his fiddle at a North Park reception last month to celebrate the release of his new book.

piece of music and they looked at me. 'There is no Xerox machine here,' they told me. The closest one was miles away. They wouldn't let me take photographs. Remember, this is the Soviet Union. So I went back over the next several days and copied the music by hand."

Ever since this trip Strom has been enthralled with klezmer and all that surrounds it: Jewish history, culture, and heritage. The music has gone beyond the traditional klezmer ensemble repertoire. He has written several string quartets inspired by klezmer. Strom was also commissioned by the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity to write a symphony, which was premiered by the Saint Louis Symphony.

Strom began playing the violin at the age of eight. He recalls, "It was Mrs. Baker who came into the school and tested our musical ability. She would play bits of music. 'Can you hear that? Can you sing that?' she would ask us." It turned out that Strom had some ability and for \$20 a month for the rental of an instrument, Mrs. Baker taught Strom the violin.

By the time Strom moved to San Diego with his parents when he was 13, he had lost interest in the violin and wasn't practicing. His parents told him that he should keep the instrument if his interest was renewed, but they wouldn't pay for lessons if he wasn't going to practice. It was Charles McCloud, director of the Civic Youth Orchestra at the time, who convinced the young Strom that he should try out for the organization because he had a good chance of getting in.

"There were 32 violins. I was the thirty-second violinist," he recalls. Just like the student

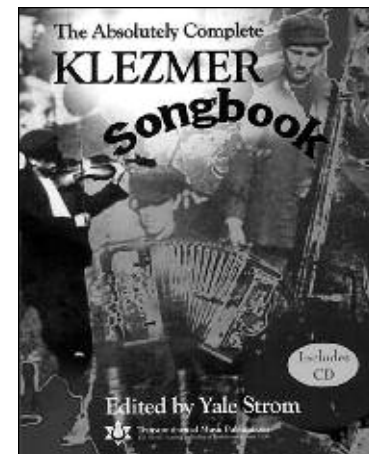
who graduates with the lowest grades from medical school and still gets to be called doctor, Strom was in. Playing in the band with schoolmates and having fun with his peers renewed his interest in music. As his playing improved, he wound up as fourth chair after graduating to the more senior youth orchestra. For Strom, music remained a fun part of his life, but it wasn't his passion. He never considered it as a possible major study when he went to college.

Another tuning point in Strom's life, almost as important as that night at the Sushi Gallery, happened during his junior year when a friend suggested that they study in Sweden. Strom filled out the paperwork and became one of 42 students from the United States to be chosen for an exchange program that took him to Uppsala University. He says, "Here is where I was exposed to other music — Swedish music. Europeans take jazz very seriously and it was the first time that I started really listening to jazz. When I went to the Soviet Union, it had a much more intellectual thing going on that I was used to in the States. I thought this is what I want to hang with."

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a professor of performance studies at NYU, helped Strom channel his desire for intellectual stimulation. She convinced him to pursue a master's degree at NYU. To support himself while he immersed himself in Yiddish studies, Strom did what all honorable musicians have done to earn a buck, he busked in the subway. "This was back when it was still illegal," he recalls. "A cop gave me a ticket. And when I went to court, the judge asked where I had been busking. I told him and he looks at me and says, 'I've given you money!'" The ticket, of course, was dropped.

After finishing his master's degree Strom returned to Eastern Europe, this time to chronicle more than just the music of the Jews living there.

Continued on next page. ➔



Strom's latest book, an amazing collection of songs, with an extensive history of klezmer music

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Klezmer: The Music of Laughter and Tears

by Paul Hormick

It has been said that the music of Mozart has the wonderful ability to sound both happy and sad in the same moment. Klezmer music has that same distinction, mixing both joy and sorrow, but musicians of the klezmer can also simultaneously produce wistfulness, defiance, anger, bliss, listlessness, obstinacy, remorse, and bemusement. And that's just when they're tuning up.

Klezmer is the music of the Eastern European Jews. It is folk music largely based on the liturgical music of the synagogue and temple, but it developed its own life when it was used for dancing. Originally, klezmer (plural klezmerim) referred to musical instruments and was later extended to refer to musicians themselves.

Many sources trace the beginnings of klezmer back to the fifteenth century, but there is much to klezmer that goes back even further. One often hears drones and periods when the musicians



Group of Gypsy musicians featured in Strom's film, *Carpati*

play in very open time without a beat, which goes back to music of the Middle East, where the Diaspora of the Jews occurred in the second century.

When political turmoil developed at the beginning of the tenth century in the Eurasian region north of the Caspian Sea where many Jews lived, these people migrated to the regions of Eastern Europe. They established communities in Poland, Hungary, Germany, Romania, and Russia where they became known as the *Ashkenazi*.

When the Jews moved West they took Asian modalities with them, but

they were also influenced by the music and the instruments of their new homes. Most notably, they picked up various forms of dance and folk music, playing waltzes, mazurkas, and polkas. In certain Eastern European countries like Romania, klezmer rhythm structures might contain (to our ears) such unusual time signatures as 5/8 or 11/8.

Possibly one of the most distinctive characteristics of klezmer is its ornamentation, which imitates the human voice. When playing this music, musicians imitate sighing, laughter, and other outbursts. If you hear a fiddle or clarinet sound like it's crying, it's probably klezmer.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s waves of Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to Western Europe and the Americas. Many of them came to the United States, mostly settling along the East Coast, particularly in New York City. Jews accounted for over 30 percent of the city's population 75 years ago. Much of the culture centered around the Jewish theatres along Second Avenue, so much so that the street became known as Yiddish Broadway.

Still more musical cross fertilization occurred with the show tunes that were being played on Broadway as well as the other musical industry juggernaut, the songwriters and publishers of Tin Pan Alley. When most Americans think of klezmer, they are thinking of songs like "Bei Mir Bist Du Shoen," which crossed over into popular song and was performed by the Andrews Sisters.

The great masters of American song included a great number of Jewish



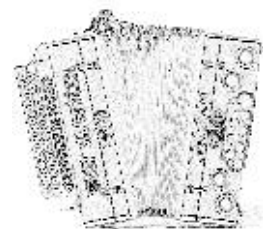
Yale Strom and his klezmer band, *Hot Pstromi*

songwriters and composers such as Irving Berlin and George and Ira Gershwin. The cross fertilization that influenced klezmer also worked the other way, and many of the tunes of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway were influenced by Jewish folk music. The greatest marriage of this cross fertilization was in Broadway's biggest hit — *Fiddler on the Roof* — which used klezmer as inspiration for its songs.

The 1980s saw a great revival of klezmer music, with bands like the Klezmatics bringing this music to new audiences. This was a definite departure from the usual bar mitzvahs and weddings as well as block parties and gigs for big corporations that klezmer bands were hired to play back then.

Klezmer continues to adapt, evolve, and transmogrify. The

Freilachmakers, a northern California klezmer string band, juice up their mix with helpings of Appalachian and Irish music. And some of the most avant-garde stuff can be heard from a group called Hasidic New Wave Jews and the Abstract Truth. Yale Strom thinks that the sky is the limit. "There is no end to this," he says. "We've got klezmer joining up with Cajun, Latin, everything. There is no end to where people can take this."



Yale Strom, continued from previous page

In 1987 he left with friend and photographer Brian Blue to look into the lives of these people. Although it would be two more years before the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union would become the study of historians, there was a feeling of change in the air, and great change was about to occur. Strom and Blue felt that they were seeing a world that might soon disappear. Inspired by Roman Vishniac's book *The Vanished World* — a 1947 publication that portrayed the lives of European Jews before the Holocaust — the pair put together *The Last Jews of Eastern Europe*. Through photographs and personal

essays, the book depicts Jewish life during the last days of the Soviet regime.

Strom has authored a number of other books, all of them pertaining to Jewish history, society, or its music of klezmer. Most recently he has published *The Absolute Complete Klezmer Songbook*, which does for klezmer what the *Fiddlers Fakebook* did for Irish music. Just about any tune that your uncle Marvin could hum, this songbook has. When Strom talks about his books, or his music and compositions for that matter, he recalls the satisfaction of recording the lives of Eastern European Jews. As he puts it, "I'm obviously doing something right."

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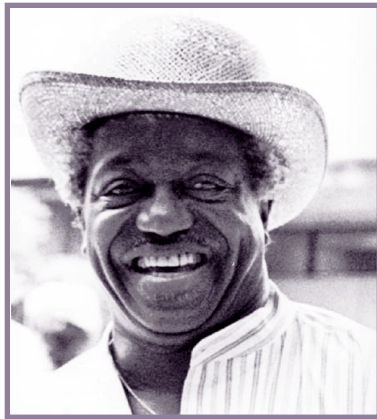


by Bart Mendoza

Last month the jazz world suffered a tremendous loss with the passing of bass trombonist Jimmy Cheatham on January 12. Speaking with his wife and musical partner, Jeannie Cheatham, at her La Jolla home just prior to Jimmy's passing, one is struck by her graciousness as well as an infectious laugh and a wealth of knowledge that she's more than happy to share. San Diego is very fortunate that the Cheathams chose to call San Diego their home, as they had a huge influence on generations of artists and cast a very large shadow over the local jazz community.

Jeannie and her husband arrived in San Diego in 1977 already in the midst of an incredible music career. Although they had recorded numerous tracks with other artists, it wasn't until their arrival here that their music made it to major label status, which in the process gave San Diego's jazz scene a major shot in the arm. A master of Kansas City-styled jazz blues, Jimmy was born June 18, 1924, and studied at the New York Conservatory of Modern Music. Jeannie, on the other hand, was born on August 14, 1927, in Akron, Ohio. By the age of five she was already immersed in music, thanks to her family, taking piano lessons and eventually accompanying her mother in the choir. "I loved classical music," she remembered. "But then my mother let me go to a party and I

heard the album *After Hours* by Avery Parrish." Jeannie fell in love with jazz as a teenager and it wasn't long before word of her keyboard prowess reached the world of touring musicians. She toured with Cab Calloway and by the end of the 1950s had accompanied everyone from T-Bone Walker, Dinah Washington, and Dakota Staton to Jimmy Witherspoon, Bo Diddley, and Johnny Ray.



Jimmy Cheatham in the 1980s

In 1956, when Jeannie was in Buffalo, New York, for a jam session and Jimmy had come to town to visit his mother, the two musicians met. Romance quickly ensued, and the pair married in 1959. They eventually settled in the New York area where Jimmy was employed during the 1960s as music director for Chico Hamilton's group. In 1964 Jeannie recorded her first album, *Academy Awards in Jazz*, with fellow pianist Roberta Como. "We did 'Over the Rainbow' in three keys," she laughed, joking that trying to stay in tune was

the thing she remembers most about that experience. The couple continued to perform and record with many big names, including Ornette Coleman and Count Basie. Jimmy even had a short stint with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1972. Throughout the 1970s he taught at Bennington College in Vermont, then at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Teaching was also a big part of what he did in San Diego.

The Cheathams relocated to San Diego in 1978 and settled in La Jolla, where Jimmy taught in the jazz studies program at UCSD. The couple dove into the local music community right away and quickly became a crucial element of the local jazz set. From 1978 through 1984, they ran weekly jam sessions at both the Sheraton and Bahia hotels, stopping only when a resurgence of interest in the couple's music began to gain international recognition. "Everywhere we ever lived we had jam sessions," Jeannie pointed out. "We finally had to stop when we started to go on the road. But you know what was the most unusual about those jam sessions?" she asked. "Airline pilots would help out. It was pilots that brought us a lot of our audience. They would hang out at the Sheraton where we had the sessions. They had such a good time that they'd later announce that there was something going on just before the planes landed. That was a big part of our regular crowd," Jeannie recalled.

In 1983 Jeannie was featured in a documentary called *Three Generations of Blues* alongside legendary blues singers Sippie Wallace and Big Mama Thornton.



Jimmy Cheatham, directing his jazz band at UCSD

It was one of Jimmy's students at UCSD that tipped off Concord Records about the duo. "He brought the president of the label to a jam session, and it all grew from that," Jeannie remembered. The pair signed with Concord Records in 1984, releasing *Sweet Baby Blues* that same year and eventually issuing nine albums. That first disc yielded a verified dance floor favorite, "Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On." The tune, which has become the Cheathams' signature song, has



A LIFE OF MUSIC, JOY, & INSPIRA

A Touching Note from a Former Student

I just learned today that my mentor Jimmy Cheatham died on Friday (a day before Michael Brecker). Jimmy was the single most important person in my musical career. When I first met him in fall of 1978, I was a freshman biology student at UCSD, with a minor in music. The moment I met Jimmy I knew he was going to be an influential force in my life. Of course, I never realized then that I would change my plans for a career in medicine for one in music, but after five years of studying with Jimmy, taking every class he taught and playing at the jam sessions he and his wife Jeannie held Sunday nights, I was ready to launch out on this strange and rewarding journey that I'm still engaged in. During my years at UCSD I saw Jimmy six days a week, more than my own family. His effect on my life was profound in so many ways. Not only did I learn about how to play jazz, but I also learned so much about life and how to be a responsible citizen of the world and to honor those who'd come before me while helping to keep the legacy of jazz, our country's unique cultural contribution, alive. Jimmy never spoke of his educational activities as teaching; he would refer to his interactions with students as "trading experiences." Well, I got the better deal, because the experiences he traded for mine were a repository of great knowledge about music, life, and love. I've carried his concept of "trading experiences" into my own teaching over the years, and now I'm glad to be sharing many of my experiences with my own students, particularly in the jazz history class I'm teaching now at Grossmont College. The foundation that Jimmy helped me build has served me well in my career as a jazz musician and educator, and I'm proud to be able to carry on just a small part of his legacy.

Rest in peace, Jimmy, and keep swingin'.

Love,
Chris [Klich]

turned up in interesting places, including novels (*Cooler by the Lake* by Larry Heineman, 1992), television (performed by a cast member on the TV sitcom *Martin*), and a live performance by the Dirty Dozen Brass Band in the two decades since its release. The song is well on its way to becoming a blues standard with covers that now include versions by Chuck Carbo (Rounder, 1993), Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, and the Magic Rockers (Telarc, 1998). "It was great when Martin Lawrence sang it on his show. He sang just a bit of it during a comedy routine, but I still get royalties from it," Jeannie commented. "Linda Hopkins just recorded it as well, but my favorite version is by a Japanese

group called Last Gin of the Day. I don't know how they heard it, but it's just wonderful."

Just for fun, the pair always included a signature sign off on each of their discs, ending in a group sing along with the "choir" or with anyone they could cajole in front of a microphone for the purpose. The duo toured extensively with their band the Sweet Baby Blues Band, earning the prestigious Grand Prix du Disque de Jazz award in 1985 for their debut album. The Cheathams never seemed to slow down. In between their album releases, the band performed on NBC-TV's *The Tonight Show* in 1988. Their fifth album, *Luv in the Afternoon*, was also an award winner, netting the Blues



TION

don't even know where we fit. There is no incentive for labels to release new music, since now it's just people downloading all day long. Audiences don't know what to listen for anymore; they don't know how to react to subtlety. They're used to loud volume and such. You just get hit over the head with a plank," she quipped.

Road work has lost a lot of its charm as well. "I still enjoy performing live, but it's not fun anymore," she remarked. It may come as a surprise to modern day musicians, but despite technological advances, many older musicians don't see today's music business as better. "Today, everything is so strict. You can't take your horn on the plane with you, or you have to buy an extra ticket for it. You used to be able to put your valuable instrument in the closet behind the pilot's cockpit, but that's not possible anymore, so travel is a much more difficult thing to do than in the past." Venues are also a problem. "The younger sound people are used to rock 'n' roll now," she said. "It makes a difference. Generally they don't know how to work with quieter music."

San Francisco Chronicle/Photo: Katy Radatz



Jeannie Cheatham

In 2006 Jeannie's autobiography, *Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On: My Life in Music*, was published by the University of Texas Press and includes a six-song EP. Painting a vivid picture of a long and storied career in music, the book is essential reading. "I didn't sit down to write an autobiography," she said. "Originally, I started to write an article on Big Mama Thornton. Hers was such a lovely story



Jeannie Cheatham

that needed to be told. And that's when someone told me I should get my own story down. It took a while to do it because I wrote it while on the road." While she's enjoyed the experience of being an author, she's found it quite different from the music world. "I never knew you had to publish yourself," she laughed. "With records, you hand them to a disc jockey and it either takes off, or doesn't, from there. With this book, it's taken a lot of work to get noticed, but I've been able to do a few TV and radio shows here and there to help promote it. I'd love to get on Oprah to discuss it. That would be perfect," she joked. After decades in music, what is she proudest of? "Getting in the Smithsonian," she replied. "We have the story of our life there now, recorded as an oral history." Bringing the conversation full circle, Jeannie beams with pride. "Do you know what of ours gets a lot of hits on their website? The entry on how to start a jam session."

At press time Jeannie was planning to go ahead with performances on February 25 as an honoree at the San Diego Jazz Party and on May 11 at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.



Jimmy, playing his trombone

Jimmy & Jeannie Cheatham

DISCOGRAPHY

ALBUMS

- 1964 *Academy Awards in Jazz*. Grenadier. (Jeannie Cheatham only)
- 1984 *Sweet Baby Blues*. Concord Jazz 4258 LP/CD/CA.
- 1985 *Midnight Mama*. Concord Jazz LP/CD/CA.
- 1987 *Homeward Bound*. Concord Jazz LP/CD/CA.
- 1988 *Back to the Neighborhood*. Concord Jazz.
- 1990 *Luv in the Afternoon*. Concord Jazz.
- 1991 *Basket Full of Blues*. Concord Jazz.
- 1993 *Blues and the Boogie Masters*. Concord Jazz.
- 1995 *Gud Nuz Bluz*. Concord Jazz CD.
- 1998 *Concord Jazz Heritage Series: Jeannie and Doc Cheatham*. Concord Jazz CD.

BOOKS/MISCELLANEOUS

- Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On: My Life in Music*. University of Texas Press (includes six-song CD EP 2006)
- Karaoke Spotlight Series. *Legends of the Blues Vol. 2*. CDG

COMPILATIONS

- 1994 *A Concord Jazz Christmas*. Concord Jazz 4613. (Jeannie Cheatham contributes "An Apple, an Orange and a Little Stick Doll")
- 1994 *Fujitsu-Concord 26th Jazz Festival*. Concord Jazz 7003. (live album features Jeannie Cheatham on vocals on two songs)
- 1996 *Jazz Celebration: Tribute to Carl Jefferson*. Concord Jazz 7005. (four-CD set includes Cherry Red live)
- 1999 "Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On." *Jazz Moods: Groovin' the Blues*. Concord Jazz 5210.
- 2000 "Luv in the Afternoon." *Jazz in the Afternoon*. Concord Jazz 5214.
- 2001 "Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On." *Jazz Moods: Jazz Party Mix 3*. Concord Jazz.

SESSIONS

- 1967 Bill Dixon. *The Jazz Artistry of Bill Dixon*. RCA SP3844. (vinyl album)
- 1978 Grover Mitchell. *Meet Grover Mitchell*. Jazz Chronicles 104. (vinyl album featuring the Cheathams)
- 1980 Grover Mitchell. *Devil's Waltz*. Jazz Chronicles. (vinyl album featuring the Cheathams)
- 1994 George Lewis. *Changing With the Times*. New World 80434. (features the Cheathams as well as a song co-write credit for Jeannie Cheatham on the title track)

COVERS (EACH FEATURES "MEET ME WITH YOUR BLACK DRAWERS ON")

- Chuck Carbo, *Drawers Trouble*. Rounder, 1993.
- Big Al Carson, *Take Your Drunken Ass Home*. Mardi Gras Records, 2002.
- Sydney Ellis, *Tug River*. Black Wallet Records, 2003
- Noel Friedline, *One for Maxcene*. Free Lion Records, 1994.
- Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson and the Magic Rockers, *Slammin' on the West*. Telarc, 1998.
- Floyd McDaniel Trio, *Live*. David Drazin, 2002.
- Nap "Don't Forget the Blues" Turner, *Live at Cada Vez*. Right on Rhythm, 2002.
- Matthew Robinson, *Matthew Robinson and the Texas Blues Band*. Dialtone Records, 2003.
- Sheena, *Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On*. 1999
- Sweet Baby Jai, *Evolution*. Sunset (Burnside), 2005.
- Steve Thorpe, *Trouble*. Lost Gold Records, 2004.
- Thunder Blues Band, *Before and After Katrina*. Louisiana Music Factory, 2006.





Bluegrass CORNER

by Dwight Worden



THE DOBRO: NEWEST OF THE BLUEGRASS INSTRUMENTS

Let's take a look at the dobro, one of the newest instruments to be used in bluegrass music, and see what it is all about. The dobro is a guitar that is played horizontally in the lap, has strings that are raised above the fretboard, and is played with finger picks and a thumb pick on one hand and a steel slide bar in the other. It can produce sustained, sliding notes that make it, along with the fiddle, one of only two bluegrass instruments that produce these kinds of sustained sliding sounds.



John Dopyera

The dobro was invented in the late 1920s by the Dopyera brothers, John and Rudy. Working with George Beauchamp, the Dopyera brothers formed the National Stringed Instrument Company, which began making the famous National steel guitar. However, the partnership with Beauchamp was contentious, and soon the Dopyera brothers left and formed their own company — the Dobro Company, as in Dopyera BROthers, in 1928. Their new dobros used wooden bodies rather than the steel ones favored by the National guitars.



Gibson dobro

At the time the Dobro Company and National Stringed Instrument Company were formed, there was limited, if any, amplification available, so the Dopyera brothers were looking for a way to make a guitar produce more sound. John Dopyera developed a system of inserting three small cones into the guitar to make the tri-cone guitar. He then developed a guitar with a larger single cone inside, anchored by what is called a "spider," so that the cone or "resonator" would act as a speaker to project sound out the front of the instrument. These inner workings were capped by a "faceplate" on top of the guitar, which makes the dobro look a little like a guitar with a hub cap on top. Since the single-cone guitar was louder than the tri-cone, it became the dobro standard. While John Dopyera's early design is still the basic design of some dobro and resonator guitars, contemporary luthiers such as Tim Scheerhorn and Paul Beard have introduced significant changes, such as using sound posts instead of a soundwell, thus bringing noteworthy changes to the sound of the instrument.

In line with what goes around comes around, the success of the Dobro Company allowed the Dopyera brothers to acquire the National Stringed Instrument Company in 1934 and merge it with their company to form the National Dobro Company. After many tosses and turns, the Gibson Company acquired the rights to the dobro trademark in 1993 and has produced resonator-guitars under the dobro name ever since. Other manufacturers of dobro-style guitars who do not have the naming rights held by Gibson call their instruments resonator-guitars. Interestingly, John Dopyera, the dobro's original designer, had a shop in Escondido for a while in the 1960s.

The earliest dobro music was Hawaiian in style, but it was soon picked up for playing other styles including blues and bluegrass. Brother Oswald was an early dobro player

who brought the instrument in to early bluegrass. But it was Josh Graves of Flatt and Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys who really put the dobro on the bluegrass map. Essentially every modern dobro player credits Josh "Buck" Graves as a major influence. Mike Aldridge of the Seldom Scene was the next significant innovator on the instrument, with a trademark tone that remains the standard other players seek to achieve. Contemporary standouts on the instrument include Jerry Douglas from Alison Krauss and Union Station, Rob Ickes of Blue Highway and Three Ring Circle, and great up-and-comers like Andy Hall of the Infamous Stringdusters and Michael Witcher of Missy Raines and the New Hip.

While not a "required" bluegrass instrument, the dobro is now a staple of many great bands. Ironically, the prevalence of the dobro in modern bluegrass comes in spite of the fact that Bill Monroe, the father of bluegrass music, is reported not to have liked the dobro ("That ain't no part of nothing" is perhaps his apocryphal comment on the instrument), and never used it in his music.

If you want to hear great dobro music, pick up any of the Alison Krauss and Union Station featuring Jerry Douglas albums or any Blue Highway album and marvel at how much the modern resonator-dobro contributes to the bluegrass music we all love. Better yet, visit your favorite music store, pick one up, and give it try!

SCIENTIFIC GOSPEL COMES TO TOWN

In the mood for something different while



Opossums of Truth

learning a little science presented by clever music that's guaranteed to make you laugh? You might want to check out Dr. Stephen Baird and his Opossums of Truth in one of their upcoming concerts. This unique band will be presenting a series of three concerts. The first is on Saturday, February 3, 7:30 p.m., at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, 4190 Front Street in the Hillcrest area. The second concert is on Tuesday, February 6, 7:30 p.m., at the North Coast Repertory Theater in Solana Beach, with the final concert on Saturday, February 10, 7:30 p.m., in the Liebow Auditorium, School of Medicine on the UCSD campus in La Jolla. Doc Baird and his Possums promise a different show at each location, and you can count on songs about everything from the big bang theory and life on Mars to romance and everything in between. For more info, go to: www.scientificgospel.com.

RALPH STANLEY IS COMING TO TOWN

Living legend Ralph Stanley and his Clinch



Ralph Stanley

Mountain Boys will play a concert at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach on Tuesday, February 20. The show starts at 8 p.m. with an opening local band. For information and tickets, go to www.bellyup.com.

There's lots going on, so I hope to see you all out there enjoying bluegrass music in San Diego.

The Zen of Recording

by Sven-Erik Seaholm

THE NAMM SHOW

The 2007 NAMM show at the Anaheim Convention Center seemed like the "x-treme" version, with brighter lights, wilder sounds, scads of intriguing products, and surprisingly more people than ever — and that was just the lobby!

Getting there was really the hard part. Actually no, I take that back. We arrived in "the O.C." (gawd, how I absolutely hate that term) in pretty good time, but then were turned away from every parking lot entrance because my badge was "the wrong color." Explaining to each of the "please move along, sir" attendants that my badge was inside, while showing them my printed out email confirmation, was an exercise in futility.

Parking was eventually obtained about a quarter of a mile away, which gave my wife and me enough time to grumble out our pre-show angst by the time we made it to the lobby. Once inside, things went much more smoothly and almost instantly I was immersed nose-deep in gizmos, brochures, and dialogues.

"Like what?" you may be asking yourself.

The first booth we stopped at this year was Roger Nichols Digital, which had its long awaited line of digital plug-ins on display. Mr. Nichols was the recording engineer for Steely Dan among others, so it's a foregone conclusion that his products will bear an unmistakably hi-fi character. What makes these tools unique is their new twist on familiar designs. The Dynamizer is a multiband compressor with the ability to use different attack and release settings for each of its four bands. The Detailer is a mastering plug-in with dynamic widening, intelligent parameter adjustment that utilizes fuzzy logic to ensure the settings best fit your style of music. There is so much more, and we hope to cover the entire line in upcoming issues.

NEXSYN from upstart company KEY-TOSOUND is a software-based hybrid synthesizer that not only provides full editing and sound design capabilities, but also includes a four-gig sample library

from Big Fish audio and allows users to upload and download presets from other users via an ingenious online browser. Look for more on this soon.

DR Handmade Strings turned me onto a cool product called Extra String Life, a liquid polymer coating that molecularly bonds with your strings, which in turn extends their life and reduces corrosion and breakage.

I stopped by the travelwellness, inc.



booth to let them know that I had really enjoyed using the Palm Dry to "de-clamify" my hands at gigs. They gave me a bottle of Vocal-eze throat spray, saying "You're going to need this with all the talking you'll be doing." They were right, and the stuff works like magic. Joss Stone and Rob Thomas swear by the stuff, and now so do I. They also had a cool thing called Vira-Eze Mic Wipes, which can be used to detoxify filthy microphones, horn mouthpieces, harmonicas, hands etc., and it's made from mushrooms!

EastWest Sounds had some really cool stuff on display that wasn't even out yet. Most notable was Fab Four, a virtual instrument that featured the sounds of virtually all the instruments the Beatles used throughout their recording career, recorded through the same kinds of equipment by Ken Scott, the engineer on many of their records. The sounds and selection were amazing, including everything from basses, guitars, and drums recorded through vintage mics and pre-amps, as well as more esoteric Indian and Middle Eastern instruments. Can't wait!

FOOTIME had some interesting foot controllers designed to reduce hand stress disorders. One actually took over simple computer keyboard and mouse tasks, while another was an electronic music page turner for those so inclined.

One cool new thought outside the proverbial box was the Snap Jack guitar



Sven-Erik Seaholm

cable from zzyzx. This product utilizes a two-part jack design. The jack is separate and plugs into your guitar or bass. The other half is attached to the cord. Each half has a magnet that corresponds to the other piece. So, when you go to plug in to your amp or PA, the magnets just snap together with no audible (and annoying) clicks or pops. Its quick-change ability makes it great for those with multiple instruments too! Speaking of sticking things in your jacks, it doesn't get any easier than Amp-U-Plug-N-Play, a tiny battery-powered amp with a built-in jack so you can just shove it into your guitar and rock out.

Rock Jimmies snap onto the end of your cable to spruce up the boring looking jack with guitar "bling" like iron crosses or devil heads. I got a glow-in-the-dark skull model — sweet.

I was standing around looking for my NAMM directory when I saw this guy walk past me in a marching band uniform carrying the coolest thing: a Beatles Yellow Submarine lunch box that he had turned into an electric ukulele! I literally ran after him (he was moving very fast) and asked him all about it. His name was Ukulele Ray and said he didn't have a booth this year but wanted to show these around. Go to boxaleleco.com and look for his YouTube video where he plays the model I mentioned. Fabulous.

Duck's Deluxe guitar strings and accessories has a cool little piece that fits onto the end of a drill or power screwdriver, allowing for lightning quick string winding. I've been using one for a couple of years and love it.

Inventor Charlie McMahon and I had a great time playing his Didjeribone, a 10-tone cross between a trombone and didgeridoo made from simple plastic tubes. Love his imagination.

Finally, the star of the show as far as new products are concerned would have to go to upstart company Tritical. Their Powertune System is a retrofit that replaces your tuning pegs, bridge, volume, and tone knobs with theirs and allows for the simplest, most efficient tuning system I have ever seen. Simply pull the knob to activate it, select the tuning you prefer (standard or presets like DADGAD), strum an open chord and within seconds, your guitar is at the desired tuning and perfectly in tune! I watched the demonstration twice and it was like a freakin' magic trick! There's even a little light that goes on at the back of your headstock when you're tuning to let the drummer know not to start the song yet! Oh, sweet little details — how I love thee so.

The parking situation was greatly improved on the second day, but I think we would've been more than happy to make the walk, considering all the great stuff on display. I can't wait to dig deeper throughout the year. See ya then.

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LET'S MAKE THAT RECORD!



Hosing Down

by José Sinatra

OKEY-DOKEY

"Well, it'll be like an open mic night," he said. "Without any real instruments. The music's already there. All you'll have to do is sign up the performers and introduce them before they go on. It'll be fun." Edwin Decker made it sound like fun all right, and he'd be there as well, which made it fun already. And I hadn't been to that particular Pacific Beach club in ages — it had an entirely different name back then when Troy Danté and I had played a memorable seminar of love on its stage — but I recalled enjoying the environment. Now, how would I feel about hosting their experiment in karaoke each week on a single, non-weekend night?

My thoughts slid back down the moist slide of memory . . . decades before when men were men and women were chicks and I was a successful speller at a private club in Monte Carlo. *Café des Cooches* was the name of the bar, and I was known by *tout le monde* as Monsieur Le Hose. It was there that I learned and perfected vocal enunciation, microphone technique, and delayed gratification. The thrill of the spotlight, the ways of love. The power of paternity suits, the surest plan to slip away to America without detection. Even now I occasionally catch myself wondering about the fate of Danielle, Delphine . . . and Columbine, the frisky goat we shared in those fragrant years.

But none of that mattered now. No, now it was time for a decision to be made: do I commit one night per week of my life to helping people to have fun, finding and exercising their inner performer, holding the mic myself to read off the curious names and some of the most pedestrian, idiotic song titles a composer had actually conceived? "Baby Got Back"? "She Hate Me"? (once the monster's spoken line in *Bride of Frankenstein*, nearly 70 years later the illiterate name of a song! What's next — "Fire Bad"? Aaaaarrrggghhh.)

Soon enough we started the singing thing at the P.B. club. I was glad to have Ed Decker with me. Although he was behind the bar, he would always deliberate with me when some unexpected problem arose; many wise solutions were

plucked from the greedy womb of reason, thanks to his seasoned midwifery.

The key factor was fairness, actually. One submission at a time. Another accepted when you hit the stage. You go up in the order you've logged in. These and several similarly decent tenants travelled with me when I was, after several months, transferred to the sister club in Ocean Beach, where to this day my hosting duties have thrilled countless millions across the globe on Sunday nights. I think it's been a bit over three years now, and I haven't missed a night. Certainly late sometimes, but consistently devoted to promoting every level of performer or pervert willing to let loose on a superior sound system in a superior place.

I've come to learn that there is a *huge* mass of people who take karaoke very seriously indeed. Somewhere there are actually citywide, regional, even national competitions with serious prizes for those delusional enough to see a shiny star and reach for its promising glow.

Hogwash. Not at Winston's, dearies. Here, more than one determined student of the art has stumbled in and decried the goings-on as blasphemous, and I, myself, as the Anti-Oke.

At O.B.-Okee (I still can't spell Jesse Egan's baby, but that's how it's pronounced) the only prize is the fun to be had on stage, or drinking in the audience, as well as the transcendent splendor of being in my presence.

The rules that Edwin Decker and I forged so long ago remain in place and are displayed for all performers to read, to follow, to use to enrich their lives. Among them, the most contentious has been number three: No one will be "bumped up" [in order] for any reason, including birthdays, anniversaries, financial inducement, impending childbirth, visiting relatives, military duties, or "awesome" talent.

It's right there in black and white, but not a week has gone by without a few seemingly sophisticated participants betraying their surprising inability to read. That I have been traumatized by this vicious assault on my faith in the American educational system is a matter now in the hands of my attorneys and requires no further comment, but there is one more excuse that

Photo: Fallon Faraday



The gently twisted Mr. Sinatra

we should have foreseen, and which will soon be officially inscribed.

The exact wording might be troublesome. How about "personal pulchritude?" "Awareness of Heat?" It usually occurs somewhat late in the evening when a (oh, how do I put this and avoid sounding like the sexist pig I am?) jaw-droppingly succulent slice of womanbeast, an undiscovered world-class beauty who should be modeling in Paris, a natural wonder whose mother's loins are surely blessed for giving her birth, comes up to me, her eyes shouting a thousand promises, her voice entreating, soothing, as she nuzzles oh-so-close and whispers, "Hose . . . you can bump me up, can't you? You'll do it for me, won't you?" My eyes gorge on her perfect lips, cheeks, nasal cavities. . . .

I respond, "I'm sorry, you intoxicating target of my seed, but that wouldn't be fair."

And she'll leave confused or shocked or escorted out in a screaming rage upon the realization that for perhaps the first time in her gilded life, her personal charm and feminine potency has been rebuked by a heterosexual male who just happens to hold principle over prurience, fairness over frivolity, honor over on-her, in this great young country that some of us still call America.

A little grope might have helped. . . .



RADIO DAZE

by Jim McInnes

JIMMY CHEATHAM JOINS THE ETERNAL JAM SESSION

It's January 12. I just heard that trombonist/educator Jimmy Cheatham has entered the next dimension . . . something that makes jazz fans everywhere sad.

Last June, on my first day at KSDS Jazz 88.3, I almost knocked over two people on my way into the record library. Jazz 88.3 program director Claudia Russell was there with them, so she introduced me as "San Diego radio legend Jim McInnes" (although I prefer "the man who invented broadcasting"). To my delight, both told me that they remembered me as host of the San Diego Music Awards (1996-2002, in case you've forgotten).

I was immediately impressed by their vibe. They were Jeannie and Jimmy Cheatham, leaders of the Sweet Baby Blues Band, legends in their own right as well as a couple of the nicest people you could ever hope to meet. I became an instant fan even though I hadn't heard their records before. So many times after that meeting, when I wanted to play a vocalist on my occasional show, I'd grab one of their recordings. Jeannie is a soulful singer with a great sense of humor. I liked to play "Meet Me with Your Black Drawers On" and "Ain't Nobody's Business if I Do." Jimmy played bass trombone and led the band. He smiled a lot. That's how I'll remember Jimmy Cheatham. Ironically, their last gig took place this past September at the KSDS/O.B. Jazz Festival, which I could not attend, although I listened to the streaming audio of the show via the WNOE, New Orleans, website. So I never got the opportunity to see the Cheathams in person. My condolences to Jeannie. I hope you'll carry on for Jimmy.



Jim McInnes

B.E.T. JAZZ?

I was watching the BET Jazz channel (Cox 340) a few nights ago to see if they actually played any jazz. Their usual fare is stuff like Slow Jams Videos and celebrity interviews. When I switched over to the channel on this particular late night, it was in the middle of a show called *Jazz and Blues*. Cool. Then I saw that jazz legend Pharoah Sanders was on screen and I thought, "All right! Authentic jazz on TV!" I watched in wonder as Sanders wove his saxophone magic — for a minute and 25 seconds — until the commercial break! Weak. Shame on you, BET Jazz!

JIM'S NEW GIG

In last month's column I mentioned that I had finally gotten a full-time job offer from a local radio station. Last year, after 35 years as a rock jock, I began my "re-invention" process. I became a jazz deejay, however infrequently, on KSDS Jazz 88.3. I'm still on call but now, when I do a show there, it has to fit my new schedule because I am now doing the *news*! Whodathunkit? Yes, I am Mr. Evening News on Talk Radio 760 KFMB! That's me reading the news you need, Monday through Friday between 5 pm and midnight, on the hour and the half-hour, when Michael Savage, et al, pause for air!

That cliché is true, as someone told me when I lost my last full-time gig, that when one door closes, another one opens...that life brings you unexpected surprises. I had never even considered becoming a radio newsman. Thanks to Gina Corral at Metro Networks and to Dave Sniff at KFMB for believing in me.

I gotta go. Got a newscast coming up in 15 minutes!

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Diana Jones' Direct Approach Goes Straight to the Heart

by Mike Alvarez

Although brought up in New York by adoptive parents, singer/songwriter Diana Jones found herself drawn to the music of artists like Johnny Cash, Patsy Cline, and Emmylou Harris. Finding her birth family in the hills of Eastern Tennessee, she discovered a deep connection not only to her relatives, but to her cultural roots as well. One of her grandfathers was Robert Lee Maranville, a musician who had played with Chet Atkins, and it is he to whom her new album is dedicated. Given all of this, it's not hard to conclude that she was predestined to give voice to the experiences and emotions of her Appalachian heritage with as much truth and authenticity as she could muster. She has created a sound that contains elements of country, folk, and mountain music.

At first listen, her third album, *My Remembrance of You*, sounds like a simple and unvarnished country/folk/bluegrass effort. The mostly acoustic instrumentation serves to reinforce this impression. Guitar, mandolin, fiddle, bass, and drums create the backdrop for the honest tales she sings with a clear, mellifluous voice. Unlike the heavily produced pop that passes for country these days, her music does-

n't stray far from its roots. One can imagine it being played by a truly unplugged ensemble without losing any of its power.

As one delves deeper into the songs, their true sophistication is revealed, relating stories that are as universal as they are profound. Sung in plain language, her songs of love, loss, redemption, and acceptance contain themes that would resonate with any listener. "Pretty Girl" is a young woman's lament about the emptiness of the attention she attracts. In addition to singing it, Jones plays many of the instruments on this track. "Pony" is a song that has garnered a good deal of attention and critical acclaim. In it, she sings the melancholy tale of a Native American girl who finds herself in a world that is far removed from that of her idyllic childhood memories. "Fever Moon" paints a rustic picture of courtship and love that is set to a festive arrangement. It would be a perfect number for a traditional dance. Samples of these and other songs are available at her website www.dianajonesmusic.com.

It is precisely this kind of artistic openness that has garnered Jones the accolades and attention from a roots and Americana audience that is international in scope. She had already attracted a following with her first two releases, *Imagine Me* and *The One That Got Away*,



Diana Jones

but this one seems earmarked to be her breakthrough. Some have already spoken of Diana Jones in the same breath as such luminaries as the Carter family and Merle Haggard. Her storytelling prowess has been compared to that of Emily Dickinson.

It hasn't even been a year since *My Remembrance of You* was released, yet she has already gotten rave reviews, been nominated for two Folk Alliance awards, and toured all over the country appearing at folk festivals, club dates, coffeehouses, and house concerts. She took top honors at the 2006 Kerrville New Folk Contest. In addition, her album has garnered a respectable amount of radio exposure and has charted well, showing that there is still a good number of listeners who will respond to music that is authentic and substantial. The connection that her music forges with her audience is a deep and strong one.

Diana Jones is currently on tour, taking her music across the country. In the past she has been on the same bill as Martina McBride, the Del McCoury Band, and Guy Clark. She will be making an appearance at a Canyonfolk House Concert in El Cajon on February 10. Please see the calendar on page 14 or visit www.canyonfolkhouseconcerts.com for more information.

John Jorgenson: Master of Gypsy-Jazz Guitar

by Craig Yerkes

The musical resume of jazz guitar virtuoso John Jorgenson teeters somewhere between astonishing and downright unbelievable. Guitar publications have hailed Jorgenson as the foremost champion of the Django Reinhardt style of gypsy jazz guitar. His mastery of Reinhardt's style is so complete that our subject was chosen to play Django himself in a major Hollywood release, starring Charlize Theron, called *Head in the Clouds*. Not only has Jorgenson's brilliance been recognized here in the U.S., but European masters of gypsy jazz have also acknowledged his gifts and sought to collaborate with him. Jorgenson has also achieved enormous success outside of his primary genre of gypsy jazz as a founding member of two wildly popular bands, the Desert Rose Band (five number one singles), cofounded with Chris Hillman, and the Hellocasters (cult favorite among guitarists). For those projects, Jorgenson could be found slinging his Telecaster and pumpin' out mean country-rock licks that would have you wondering if this is the same guy who makes the Django stuff look so easy. As if all of that wasn't enough, Jorgenson has collaborated as a multi-instrumentalist (clarinet, pedal steel, mandolin, and saxophone!) as well as a vocalist with such superstars as Elton John, Billy Joel, and Sting. Numerous other pop stars have called on Jorgenson's talents as an ultra versatile musical journey-



John Jorgenson

man to help them make their recordings (some of them Grammy winners). In 2004, Jorgenson recorded the critically acclaimed *Franco-American Swing*, a groundbreaking CD that features the Nashville Chamber Orchestra and showcases the writing skills and instrumental virtuosity (on clarinet and guitar) of our subject.

These days, Jorgenson spends most of his musical energy playing gypsy jazz as the leader of the John Jorgenson Quintet, touring the world and making records. This exciting band will be coming to San Diego's own Dizzy's on March 1. According to Chuck Perrin, owner of Dizzy's, "John is the consummate guitarist, with astonishing skills and mastery over his instrument. I'm a guitarist too, but when I watch him play, all I can do is shake my head in wonder."

Here is an artist who brings a wealth of diverse musical expertise to every show and reviews of concerts done by this quintet have been nothing short of glowing. If you love great jazz and seeing world-class masters tear up a stage, it doesn't get any better than John Jorgenson and his band. More information on Jorgenson can be found at www.johnjorgenson.com.



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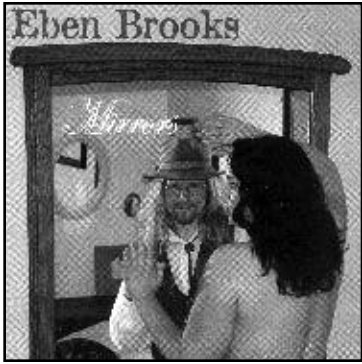
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Eben Brooks Mirrors

by Derek E. Shaw

A self-proclaimed acoustic philosopher, Eben Brooks' charm is as much in his naiveté as in his experience. Featuring 12 songs representing nearly a decade of material, much of his personal life and strife are evident in his new release, *Mirrors*, a highly emotional, heartfelt record. "For me, acoustic philosophy is about making good music and doing good things, thereby becoming better human beings," Brooks said.

A worldly yet very introspective record, *Mirrors* is sentimental, nostalgic, and philosophical. Brooks comes across like a former brazen hippie who has found a more secure and spiritual place. The music isn't incredibly original, but it's very well arranged and accompanied.

Producer Steve Langdon does a fine job of complementing the quirky, sometimes spastic songwriting. The orchestration serves to color an ambitious album that required added texture. Mandolin, stand-up bass, violin, and even an alto recorder contribute subtle touches that make a huge difference. This collection of acoustic anthems are utterly playful and catchy. The socio-political jabs are balanced by a self-deprecating awareness that makes the listener comfortable laughing and singing along.

Brooks' lyrics contain the spirit of growth and realization, not so much about changing America or achieving world peace but rather about changing oneself, being loving and tolerant, and the journey from delusion to fulfillment.

"Lightbringer's Fall" deals with the frustration of having lofty dreams but ending up working at a dead-end job. Ultimately empowering and existentialist, its message deals with demons in a harsh but brave manner in taking control of our lives, relationships, and destinies. "Too often," Brooks says, "People blame their problems on anything but themselves. It's their bosses' fault, or their spouses' fault, or the government's or the media's. They never take time to figure out how they are responsible for their situations."

A few tunes demonstrate Brooks' first stabs at alt country. The result is poppy and refined, delivering raw Americana in a satirical, almost cheesy fashion. But his nasal, borderline whiny voice is endearing in its unadulterated authenticity.

Some songs are silly and lighthearted, but most are emotional and reverent. "Black Train" is dedicated to his mother who died of breast cancer — a symphonic, harmony-packed requiem of epic proportions. The title track plays off a Stephen Donaldson novel, a beautifully melancholy song about coping with loss and depression. You can feel the loneliness in the orchestral arrangements and dreamy ambiance.

Another song inspired by a book is based on Roger Zelazny's *The Courts of Chaos*. It contains striking imagery, inducing visions of city lights, leafless trees, and lovers on a Parisian sidewalk. It was cowritten by Allison Lonsdale, a local singer-songwriter and Brooks' frequent collaborator.



Podunk Nowhere

by Derek E. Shaw

Earthy and organic, cathartic and introspective, pristine and delicate are the sounds of husband-and-wife duo Podunk Nowhere. The impassioned statement in their debut CD is both personal and relatable.

Recorded at StudiOB, the duo's heartfelt effort evokes sentimental yet painful memories. Birth and death, surfside romances and barren landscapes, obsession and release — this album feels like the diary of a wayward folk artist coming home.

Like a road trip at dusk, *Podunk Nowhere* captures that solitary moment when the stereo and setting sun meld as nostalgia flutters about. Reflective and hopeful, regretful and resilient, its sense of longing captures the day and milks our fleeting lives.

Heather Janiga and guitar wielding hubby Johnny J. are a formidable songwriting duo. Her airy voice has an indie vibe, at times hinting at a folksy Portishead or P.J. Harvey. Their country songs' sweet vocal arrangements are akin to Lucinda Williams and Wilco.

Their tunes are catchy and playful with forthright lyrics and production. The tasteful and infectious melodies are interwoven with acoustic guitar riffs, sultry bass lines, ambient noise, and creepy whispers. The subtle experimentation sprinkled throughout brings the album to life. Minimal yet textured, utterly rich and beautiful, the content is well developed for a debut release, with lyrics that hold up against the wishy-washiness of many singer-songwriters today.

A contemporary sound with traditional elements, this album is fiercely independent and unapologetic. *Podunk Nowhere* will strike a chord in all listeners because it's about accepting the past and embracing the present without worrying too much about the future.

The brutally honest "Junkee Love" chronicles the battle of addiction and its ugly cycle. Heather admits, "I'm not a stupid girl, but I've made stupid girl mistakes," later declaring, "I'll try forever.... I go down on my face and get back up for more."

The bittersweet anthem "Easy Does It" deals with self-doubt. The chorus is an explosion of acceptance and resolve with catchy soaring vocals that feel sincere. Heather's earnest lyrics and emotional delivery complement her husband's aggressive strumming, which spontaneously floats into dissonant slides and intricate picking.

Hitting the album's stride halfway through is "Embroidery Queen," a bold waltz that piles crunchy guitar leads atop a cabaret with weird chord changes, heady bass riffs, and wicked acoustic rhythms.

The country tune and final track "And, Yes" features rich harmonies, blues harmonica, and head-bobbing acoustic jams. A soulful sing-a-long with touching lyrics both genuine and charming, it's a perfect ending for this CD. The bar stool is waiting, so turn up the juke box and put your feet up.

A CD release will be held at Winston's on February 14. www.myspace.com/podunknowhere.



Fishtank Ensemble Super Raoul

by Derek E. Shaw

A flamenco frenzy of mad bohemians and Gypsies! Fishtank Ensemble's debut record is a contemporary blend of up-tempo roots music from Romania, Rome, Spain, and Japan. From the smoky cafes of Bucharest to dusty Middle Eastern caravans, this thunderous album evokes the spirit of the past, offering a savory taste of what traditional music can sound like when it's played loud and fast by some of the most gifted young musicians in the world.

A seven-piece orchestra is led by the soaring vocals of Ursula Knudsen who sings in multiple dialects and multi-tasks on saw and violin. Fishtank offers a truly unique and worldly experience, and their shows are one hell of a time!

The group's talented members include two former vagabonds who toured Europe via mule-drawn convoy, a French fiddler prodigy, a punk accordionist, the master of twenty-first century modern flamenco guitar, and one of the best Japanese shamisen players in the world.

Fishtank Ensemble presents a unique amalgamation of Gypsy, Balkan, flamenco, klezmer, and staggering original compositions. The arrangements are constantly shifting and slashing, darting and dashing, interweaving between quick riffs, wild scales, time signature changes, and complex rhythms.

Fishtank Ensemble formed in Oakland following the immigration of fiddle phenom Fabrice Martinez, who spent seven years with Knudsen traveling around Europe in a Gypsy caravan learning folk music.

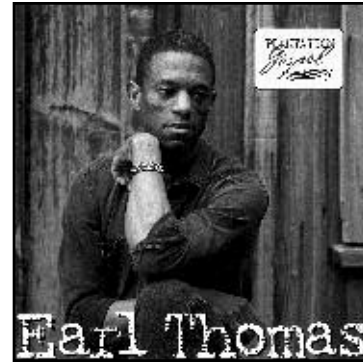
After three short weeks together, Fishtank recorded their debut album *Super Raoul*, which means "way cool" in Gypsy slang. The album was recorded live, showcasing the band's unmatched chops and breadth of styles and influences.

The opening track, "Bordeas," charges out of the gate like a fuming bull. With intricate flamenco picking, flaring fiddle, wailing Spanish vocals, and castanets, the album immediately feels like a bustling procession atop a cobblestone courtyard.

Other instrumentals like "Itty Bitty Snitty Little Frenchman" and "Troll Wedding" feel much like the suggestive titles, playful soundtracks to European follies. They are rich, innovative pieces that make the listener feel more cultured for having experienced them.

In late 2005, the Fishtank Ensemble left West Coast audiences insatiably delighted and enthralled, prompting the European members to settle down in America. A forthcoming DVD will showcase the bands exceptional live energy and, considering their uncanny ability to jam and churn out new music, a follow-up album is looming. They will be performing at Claire de Lune on Saturday, March 3.

www.fishtankensemble.com.



Earl Thomas Plantation Gospel

by Chuck Schiele

I've always preferred music that tries to say something honest and real over music that tries to be slick and cool. For those of you familiar with Earl Thomas, you will find him without the flashy city-slicker suit, to which we've been accustomed for some time now, on this record.

On *Plantation Gospel*, you will find a more inspired, honest, and important singer in Earl Thomas on this outing, upping things a passionate notch or two. In fact, if I had to take a wild guess, the passion of this work might indicate something deep and personal shifting deep within the soul of this artist. Artists go through changes, and when they do, there is a rebirth in their art that is parallel to their shift. This strikes me as just that. Like a refined elegant howl, the vocal artistry is urgent, animal, bluesy, yet razor-sharp, deliberate, and beautiful. Here is a singer deeply and emotionally involved with something he really needs to sing about.

For the most part, this is 17 tracks of public domain gospel coming from its place of origin and ancestry. It comes from West Africa, the cotton fields, the Southern Baptist choir, suffrage of an entire people, and in this case Earl's personal lineage to it.

The whole thing sounds like it was recorded at a church in the deep South. The instrumentation successfully strives to be traditional and I find it contributing to the believability of the work. The arrangements sound appropriately of another era — no electric instruments (just vocals piano, mandolins, fiddles, guitar, and percussion), which I not only found interesting, I also found it mood-altering. You can't listen to this without thinking about what it really means. And why.

You'll hear a few renditions of popular favorites such as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," along with a few lesser-known gems, each capable of locating and unlocking a different aching joy in your compassionate heart.

On each track I am reminded of the irony about how unthinkable things can lead to such a joyful noise — how love, faith, and courage lead to character. How three chords changed a people — all people — and their world. How many records do that these days?

It makes me think about how we don't need another over-produced formula "babe of the year" record, when there are records like this.

This is an important CD. www.earlthomasmusic.com



Mike McGill Keep On

by Chuck Schiele

File the new CD from Mike McGill under beach-folk-pop.

Not to name names, but if someone were to ask me the question, "What does it sound like as far as influences go?" I'd say, "Equal parts Jimmy Buffet, Jack Johnson, and Don McLean's 'Vincent' mode." It works in a coffeehouse. It works at a beach bonfire.

This 14-track collection of music was primarily written on acoustic guitar and then built into the mix with supportive arrangements contributed by producer, multi-instrumentalist, and accompanist Lee Coulter, along with Jared Gianquinto and Jim Woodruff.

This is a friendly, breezy-sounding work. The songs are good, well-written songs, which possess a charming quality to them by way of their gentleness and simplicity. The melodies are simple and right where they need to be, managing to maintain a sing-along quality. What's most interesting here is the relationship between the writer and the producer in that the writing weaves between the moves of, say, the '70s pop-folk thing and more current trends that are still being defined. The productions are really cool, sometimes leaning toward retro — sometimes leaning forward — sometimes combining both and always finding the perfect middle.

Lyrical speaking, you'll find nuggets of light irony and humor, personal insights and experiences, doses of spirituality, a few good questions, and tender relationships. Thematically speaking, McGill sings along the lines of hope — sort of an inspired "chin-up" attitude, with a soundtrack evoking seagulls, salt air, five-knot southwesterly on-shore breezes, and the hush of soft surf at the green-flash moment of twilight. It is the CD's common denominator, the thing that threads it together.

And even though there are 14 cuts on here, the running time of each is inside two or three minutes, which is amazing, because I usually think records have one or two too many songs on them, diminishing a certain "wow-ness" for the overall listen. I kinda get the same feeling when I overeat. I was ready to say that here, but I retract the thought. He gets into the song, does his business, and he's back out. Finding another spot on the beach and another song to sing.

Nobody does that anymore. Cool. Make yourself a tropical bevy with those little paper umbrellas, sliced pineapple, a curly straw, and ice cubes. Then cheer up, have a nice day, and pop in this Mike McGill CD.



Phil Harmonic Sez:

"Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile."

— Franklin P. Jones



Al Kooper @ Acoustic Music S.D.



Heather & Johnny Janiga of Podunk Nowhere



Fred Benedetti & Chris Vitas



Peter Sprague



Tom Rush @ Acoustic Music SD



El Rayo Guitarworks' Andy Greenberg and Joe Bigham



Hot Club of San Diego @ the Dell 'Arte Booth



Eliza Gilkyson @ Acoustic Music SD



Four Shillings Short @ S.D. Folk Heritage



Steve White



Los Lobos



Allen Singer @ Borders' Open Mic



Dan Shalit @ Borders' Open Mic



Dave Mason



Tony Dean



Dave Jones @ Borders' Open Mic



Chuck Schiele & Rick Derringer



Tony Lucca



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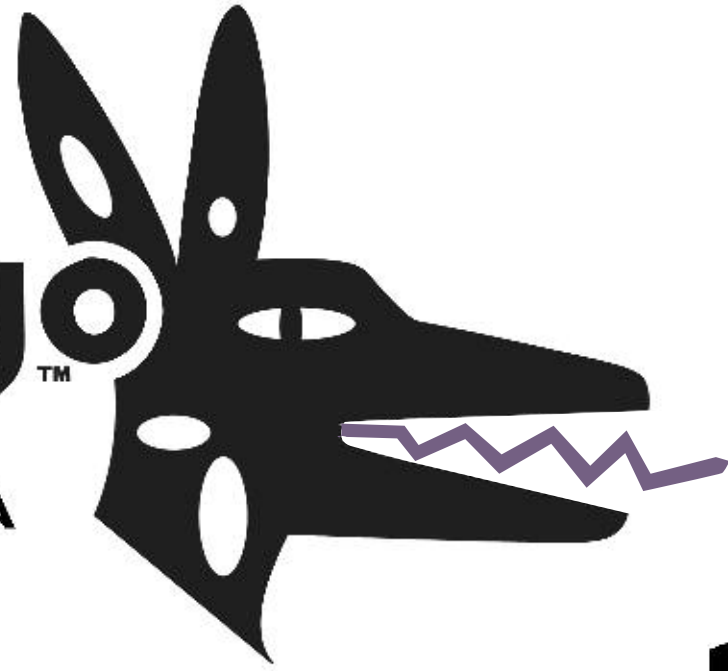
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